

# Changes in Youth Homelessness Service and Housing Systems: *A National Picture*

Issue Brief



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# **Changes in Youth Homelessness Service and Housing Systems: A National Picture**

## **Issue Brief**

Prepared for  
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
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## Executive Summary

Communities across the country continue to seek ways to prevent and end homelessness for all populations, with increasing attention to unaccompanied youth. Nationally, more than 34,000 unaccompanied youth below the age of 25 experienced homelessness on a single night in 2020 (HUD, 2020), with more than 500,000 experiencing homelessness for one week or longer throughout the year (NAEH, 2021). In 2017, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) implemented the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) to help communities strengthen efforts to address youth homelessness. The demonstration supports selected Continuum of Care (CoC) agencies in the planning, development, and implementation of coordinated community-wide efforts to prevent and end homelessness among youth aged 24 years and under. As part of an evaluation of YHDP, the progress of CoCs funded and not funded by YHDP was tracked to understand national progress in addressing youth homelessness.

Between 2019 and 2021, CoCs across the country, including both YHDP and non-YHDP CoCs, made numerous strides in addressing youth homelessness. They expanded the range of housing and services available to youth and increasingly implemented system-wide efforts to coordinate entry into housing for youth. By 2021, both YHDP and non-YHDP CoCs had increased their level of development of youth homelessness systems, such that the majority of CoCs nationally had coordinated entry systems for youth, as well as youth-specific outreach, navigation/case management, and both crisis (shelter, transitional housing, host homes) and permanent housing (rapid re-housing, permanent supportive housing, other permanent housing).

Yet the data also underscore how YHDP funding and technical assistance have helped CoCs strengthen their communities' efforts to serve and house youth experiencing homelessness to a greater degree than CoCs that have not participated in the demonstration. Across all service areas, a higher proportion of YHDP-funded CoCs have every type of assistance in place than non-YHDP CoCs. CoCs funded by YHDP were also more likely to have created systems responses specifically for youth, including youth-specific governance structures and strategic plans, and engagement of youth in CoC activities such as through Youth Action Boards (YABs). YHDP CoCs were also more likely to engage in coordination efforts—such as systems planning, data sharing, blending or braiding funding, and providing services and housing—with other systems, such as child welfare and education, that serve youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

Despite the progress made between 2019 and 2021, the majority of CoCs (70 percent) continued to report challenges in developing and implementing housing and services for youth. Common challenges CoCs reported included insufficient resources for planning; few or no youth-specific providers; lack of funding for youth-specific programs; the high cost of living coupled with limited affordable housing; lack of education and employment opportunities for youth; limited data on the scope of need and difficulty engaging youth in assistance; and difficulty coordinating with other systems. These findings suggest that continued support from HUD, through financial and technical assistance, is needed to help CoCs build their systems to respond to the housing, service, and support needs of youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

# Introduction

Communities across the country, large and small, continue to seek ways to prevent and end homelessness for all populations, with increasing attention to unaccompanied youth. Across the nation, slightly more than 34,000 unaccompanied youth below the age of 25 experienced homelessness on a single night in 2020; the vast majority (90 percent) were between 18 and 24 years of age, and the remaining ten percent were minors (HUD, 2020). Nearly half of these youth were unsheltered and sleeping in places not meant for human habitation, such as on the street, in an encampment, or in a car (NAEH, 2021; HUD, 2020). When the numbers are extrapolated over time, approximately 550,000 youth are estimated to experience an episode of a week or more of homelessness each year (NAEH, 2021). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning (LGBTQ) youth; pregnant and parenting youth; members of racial-ethnic minority groups; and youth exiting foster care are especially at risk of homelessness (Morton et al., 2018).

The Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP), launched by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in 2016, provides funding to select local and regional Continuum of Care (CoC) agencies around the country to strengthen efforts to address youth homelessness. As of December 2022, HUD has funded 92 CoCs through six rounds of funding, totaling \$374 million. The YHDP supports selected CoCs in the planning, development, and implementation of coordinated community-wide efforts to prevent and end homelessness among youth aged 24 years and under.

In 2017, HUD funded Westat, an independent research firm, to conduct a multifaceted, longitudinal evaluation of the 10 CoCs that were funded in the first round of YHDP grant funding (Round 1 YHDP CoCs). The evaluation aimed to describe the role of YHDP in shaping communities’ efforts and the resulting effects on the size and composition of the population of youth experiencing homelessness. Using a multiple comparative case study design, the research team compared the 10 YHDP CoCs with 3 “matched” peer CoCs that did not receive YHDP funding in the first round, as well as all CoCs nationally that did not receive YHDP funding.

### Contents of this Brief

This brief documents the progress CoCs nationwide have made in developing systems of services and housing for youth and identifies areas where gaps remain in housing and services. This introductory section describes the survey and presents a summary of the survey findings, followed by more detailed data on the extent to which CoCs have:

- Implemented youth-specific crisis and permanent housing.
- Implemented homeless and mainstream services and supports.

**Exhibit 1. National Survey of CoCs**

- Two survey waves:
  - Wave 1: January–March 2019
  - Wave 2: May–July 2021
- Sent to the CoC lead agency director (or designee)
- Response rates:
  - Wave 1: 81% of 393 CoCs
  - Wave 2: 79% of 379 CoCs
- Survey content:
  - Status of youth specific systems/governance and youth engagement
  - Services and housing in place for youth
  - Coordination with other systems
  - Challenges in serving youth

Throughout the report, the term **youth** refers to all youth and young adults aged 24 and younger. The term **minors** refers specifically to youth under the age of 18.



- Developed youth-specific governance structures.
- Engaged youth in CoC activities and decision-making.
- Coordinated with other systems that serve youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

This section also presents challenges CoCs face in implementing youth service systems and concludes with implications of the findings.

### Description of CoC Survey

As a part of the evaluation, the research team conducted a nationwide survey of all CoCs to assess the status of services and housing for youth experiencing homelessness. The survey was conducted in 2019 and again in 2021<sup>1</sup> to assess if and how housing and service systems for homeless youth were evolving across the nation and how the changes in YHDP Round 1 CoCs compared with changes occurring in non-YHDP CoCs. An overview of the web survey methodology is presented in exhibit 1; the final evaluation report (Henderson et al., 2022) presents a more complete description of the survey.

The first wave of the survey occurred just as the Round 1 YHDP CoCs began the implementation phase of the demonstration (2019). The second wave of the survey occurred toward the end of the grant period for the Round 1 YHDP CoCs and after the second and third cohort of YHDP grantees had begun implementation of their grant programs (2021). This timing allowed the team to distinguish data for the first three cohorts of YHDP (Rounds 1, 2, 3) from data gathered from the CoCs that did *not* receive YHDP grant funding. However, because the second survey wave was conducted before the Round 2 and 3 sites fully implemented their YHDP programs, these data may not represent all the changes those CoCs implemented during the demonstration. Exhibit 2 provides the sample sizes for CoCs that participated in the survey.

**Exhibit 2. Sample Size for Each Wave, by Group**

CoCs	Number of CoCs Responding (of Total Possible)	
	Wave 1	Wave 2
Non-YHDP	280 ( <i>out of 349</i> )	260 ( <i>out of 335</i> )
Round 1 YHDP	10 ( <i>out of 10</i> )	10 ( <i>out of 10</i> )
Rounds 2 and 3 YHDP	27 ( <i>out of 34</i> )	29 ( <i>out of 34</i> )
<b>TOTAL</b>	317 ( <i>out of 393</i> )	299 ( <i>out of 379</i> ) <sup>2</sup>

For each group, the researchers examined whether there were statistically significant differences in the percentage of CoCs that provided each type of assistance to youth in 2019 and 2021. CoCs were considered to have various housing and services available for youth if they indicated that the assistance was either fully or partially implemented. Fully implemented housing and services were defined as being in place system-wide. Partially implemented housing and services were defined as having not all pieces in place or not serving all youth/young adult populations. Caution should be used in interpreting statistical significance across the three groups. Due to small sample sizes in the groups of Round 1 YHDP and Round 2 and 3 YHDP CoCs, larger differences between the two waves are required to achieve significant differences than among non-YHDP CoCs.

<sup>1</sup> The same survey was conducted at both time periods, with some minor changes in the second wave.

<sup>2</sup> Over the 2-year period, there was some reorganization of CoCs such that some CoCs joined together or joined Balance of State CoCs.

**Summary of Key Findings**

CoCs across the country made numerous strides in addressing youth homelessness between 2019 and 2021. They expanded the housing and services available to youth and increasingly implemented system-wide efforts to coordinate entry into housing for youth. By 2021, the majority of CoCs had coordinated entry systems for youth, as well as youth-specific outreach, case management, and crisis and permanent housing. YHDP CoCs, however, were more likely than non-YHDP CoCs to have youth-specific housing and services in place and to create systems responses specifically for youth.

**Summary of Key Findings**

*Crisis and Permanent Housing*

- Between 2019 and 2021, an increased number of both YHDP and non-YHDP CoCs implemented all types of crisis (shelter, transitional housing, and host homes) and permanent housing, with the most significant increases in the percentage of CoCs implementing rapid rehousing for youth.
- CoCs in YHDP Rounds 1 through 3 realized bigger changes than non-YHDP CoCs between these two time periods in implementing housing, particularly in the implementation of host homes and rapid rehousing.

*Homeless Services and Supports*

- Between 2019 and 2021, an increased number of non-YHDP CoCs provided youth-specific outreach, coordinated entry, homelessness prevention, diversion, and navigation/case management services for youth. The greatest increase occurred in the percentage of non-YHDP CoCs providing youth-specific homelessness prevention services and navigation/case management assistance.
- YHDP CoCs in all three rounds also experienced increases in these youth-specific services and supports, with significant increases in homelessness prevention services, diversion assistance, and navigation/case management. By 2021, 80 percent or more of YHDP CoCs in Rounds 1 through 3 had each of these types of assistance in place for youth.
- Across all CoCs surveyed, however, less than one-third in 2021 reported having sufficient service capacity to meet all the needs of youth in their communities.

*Level of Development in Youth-Focused Systems*

- Although YHDP and non-YHDP CoCs increased the level of development of their youth homelessness systems over time, by 2021, YHDP-funded CoCs were more likely to have highly developed systems than non-YHDP CoCs.

*Youth-Specific Governance and Planning*

- Nationwide, there was limited movement over time among non-YHDP CoCs in developing youth-specific governance structures or strategic plans. By 2021, only about one-half of non-YHDP CoCs had youth-specific structures or strategic plans in place.
- In comparison, by 2021, nearly all YHDP CoCs in Rounds 1 through 3 had developed youth-specific strategic plans, and all had built youth-specific governance structures through their YHDP planning process.

### *Youth Engagement*

- By 2021, only one-third of non-YHDP CoCs nationally had youth involvement, compared with more than 80 percent of Round 1, 2, and 3 YHDP CoCs.
- YHDP CoCs engaged youth most commonly through Youth Action Boards (YABs), but also through CoC decisionmaking and other activities.

### *Cross-System Coordination*

- In 2021, the percentage of non-YHDP CoCs coordinating with other systems serving youth at risk of homelessness ranged from 35 to 75 percent, with the greatest coordination occurring with education, child welfare, and behavioral health, and the least amount with juvenile justice systems. There was little change in cross-system coordination since 2019 among non-YHDP CoCs.
- In contrast, YHDP CoCs had higher rates of cross-system coordination than non-YHDP CoCs in both 2019 and 2021 for each of these systems, with rates in 2021 ranging from 70 to 100 percent of CoCs.

### *Challenges in Implementing Youth Service Systems*

- In 2021, the most common challenges CoCs cited included a lack of sufficient resources to implement programs that were youth-specific or with sufficient capacity to meet the needs of youth in the community; difficulty identifying and engaging youth; and lack of affordable housing or insufficient education and employment opportunities in their communities to allow youth to be stably and permanently housed.
- Other challenges noted by smaller percentages of CoCs included difficulty coordinating with other youth-serving systems and challenges developing and maintaining youth involvement in CoC activities.

## **Crisis and Permanent Housing for Youth**

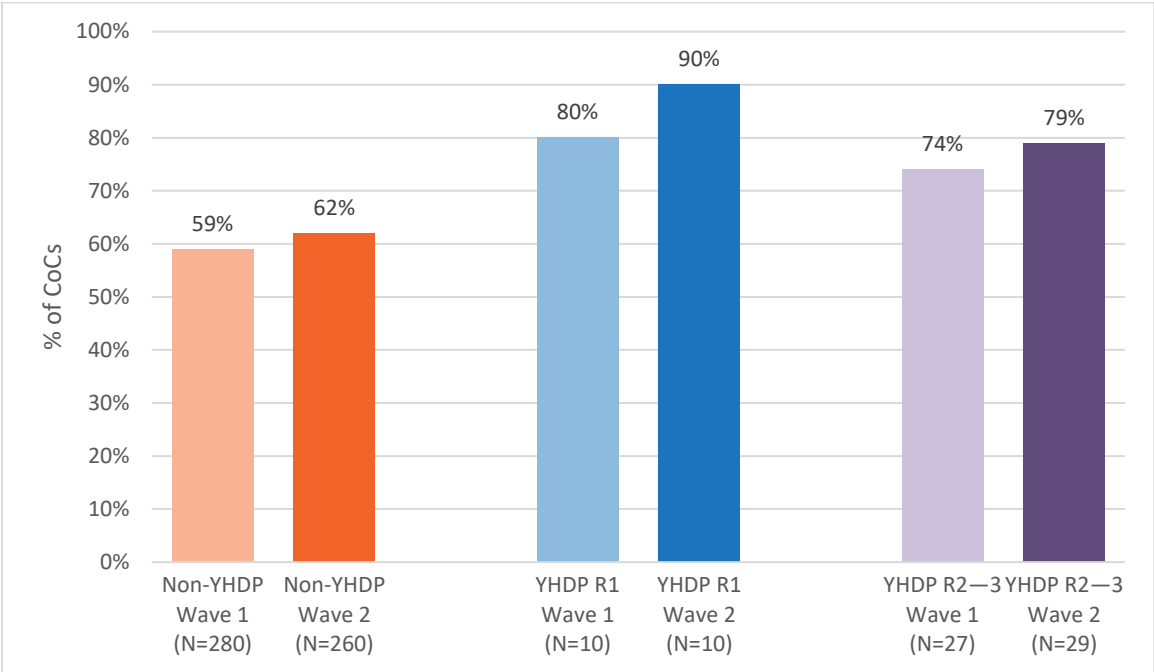
### **Emergency Shelter**

As of 2021, 62 percent of non-YHDP CoCs, 90 percent of Round 1 YHDP CoCs, and 79 percent of Round 2 and 3 YHDP CoCs had emergency shelter available for youth. As exhibit 3 shows, few additional CoCs in each of these three groups began providing emergency shelter for youth between 2019 and 2021. The limited growth in emergency shelter, especially in YHDP sites, was in part because YHDP CoCs were encouraged to use demonstration resources for other types of crisis housing for youth.

*Emergency shelter* is a type of crisis housing that provides a temporary place for youth experiencing homelessness to live while looking for permanent housing.

Across the three groups, CoCs had an average of 17 emergency shelter beds designated for youth in 2021. About one-third of CoCs (36 percent) nationally had beds designated for specific subpopulations such as minors, youth aging out of child welfare, and sexually exploited or trafficked youth.

**Exhibit 3. Percentage of CoCs with Emergency Shelter for Youth**



YHDP = Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program.  
 Source: 2019 and 2021 Survey of CoCs conducted for the YHDP Evaluation

**Transitional housing**, another form of crisis housing, is time limited housing with supportive services intended to bridge the gap from homelessness to permanent housing.

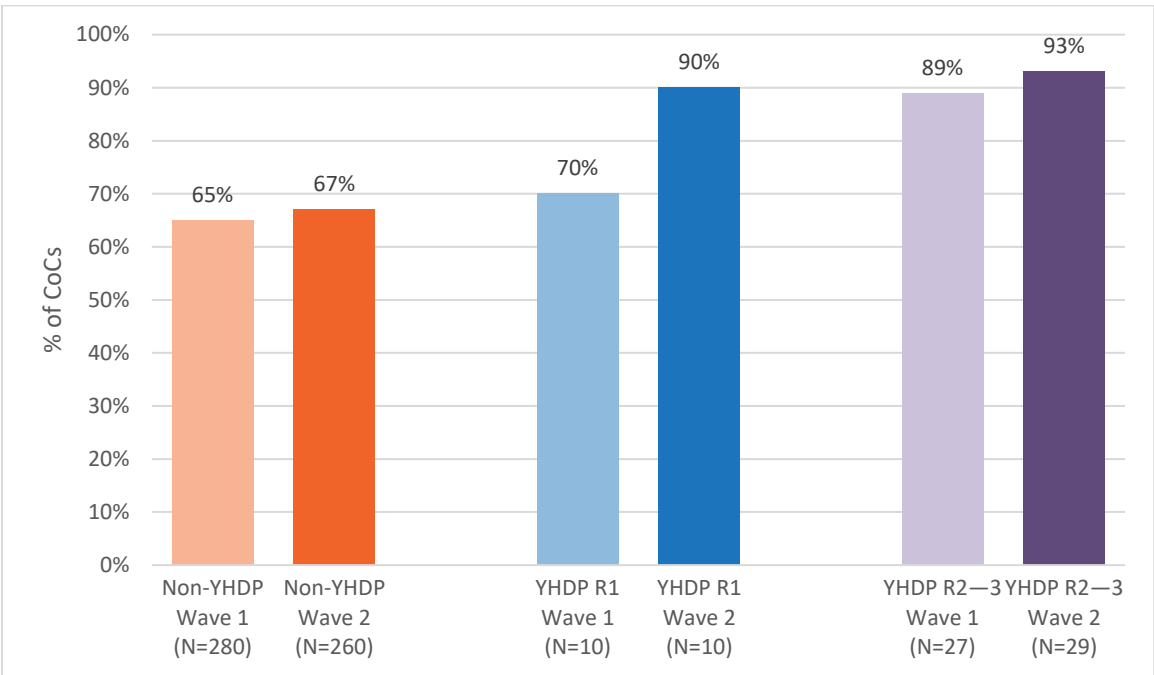
**Transitional Housing**

In contrast to emergency shelter, transitional housing often includes more supportive services and allows longer stays, often up to 24 months<sup>3</sup>. In 2021, most sites had youth-dedicated transitional housing, including 67 percent of non-YHDP CoCs, 90 percent of Round 1 YHDP CoCs, and 93 percent of Round 2 and 3 YHDP CoCs. Few additional CoCs implemented transitional housing for youth between 2019 and 2021, with an addition of 20 percent more of Round 1 YHDP CoCs (2 of 10 sites) and fewer than 5 percent of non-YHDP CoCs or Round 2 and 3 YHDP CoCs (exhibit 4).

Across all CoCs, in 2021 there were an average of 25 transitional housing beds for youth. About one-half of the transitional housing beds were dedicated for specific subpopulations, the most common of which were pregnant and parenting youth and youth aging out of foster care. Interviews with stakeholders in Round 1 YHDP sites indicated that some of the designation and expansion of youth-dedicated crisis transitional housing beds were in response to feedback from youth reporting feeling unsafe in adult shelters and crisis settings.

<sup>3</sup> Crisis transitional housing is a model of crisis housing for youth funded through the demonstration. Compared with other transitional housing approaches, crisis transitional housing is aimed at providing short stays (less than 3 months) and a quicker transition to permanent housing.

**Exhibit 4. Percentage of CoCs with Transitional Housing for Youth**



YHDP = Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program.  
 Source: 2019 and 2021 Survey of CoCs conducted for the YHDP Evaluation

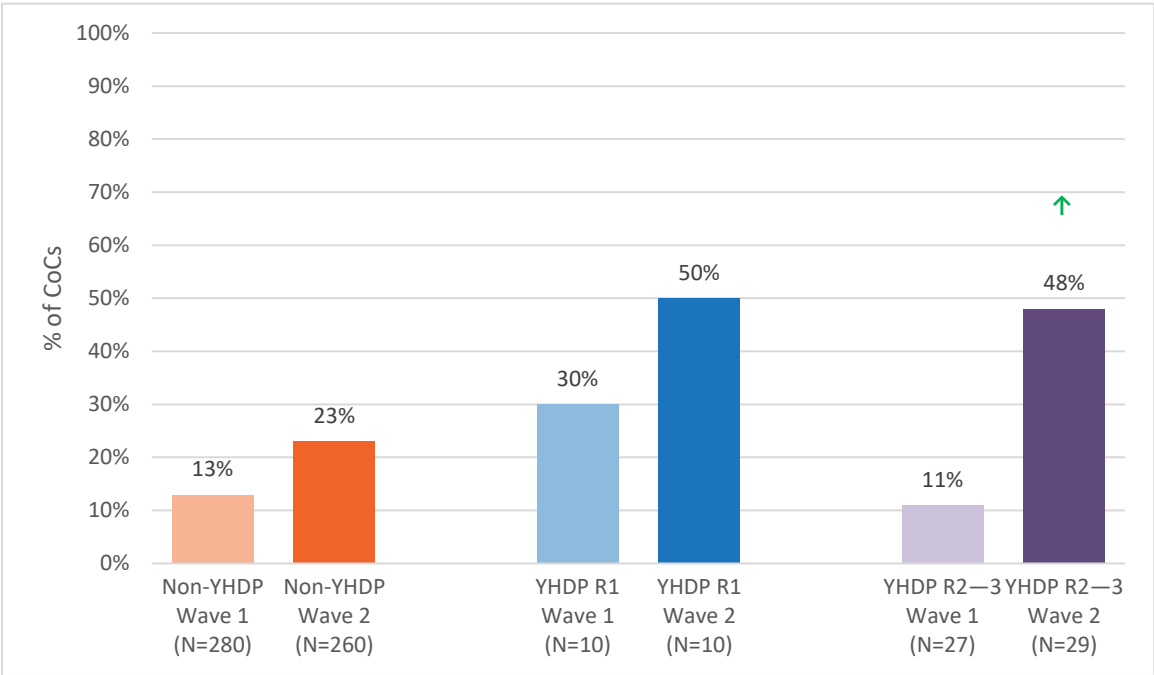
**Host Homes**

Host homes are among the more innovative temporary housing approaches increasingly promoted as a promising intervention model for youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness. CoCs, especially YHDP-funded sites, have embraced host homes as a possible strategy for serving minors who often are not eligible for other types of assistance or who are in rural areas where centrally locating crisis housing facilities may be more challenging. By 2021, host homes were available in approximately one-half of Round 1 YHDP CoCs and Round 2 and 3 YHDP CoCs. Among non-YHDP CoCs, however, only 23 percent were offering host homes in 2021.

*Host homes* are a type of housing assistance in which youth/young adults reside with an unrelated adult in the adult’s home for a temporary period of time.

As exhibit 5 shows, there was a significant increase over time in the percentage of Round 2 and 3 YHDP CoCs providing host homes to youth, increasing from 11 percent in 2019 to 48 percent in 2021. Both non-YHDP CoCs and Round 1 YHDP CoCs realized nonsignificant increases over this time period.

**Exhibit 5. Percentage of CoCs with Host Homes for Youth**



YHDP = Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program.  
 Note: Arrow indicates statistically significant increase (↑).  
 Source: 2019 and 2021 Survey of CoCs conducted for the YHDP Evaluation

Most CoCs across groups had small host home programs with 10 or fewer beds, often targeted to LGBTQ youth or minors. As learned through interviews with program staff, implementing host home programs was challenging. Providers noted that developing program policies and procedures could be time intensive, especially processes for recruiting hosts and matching them to youth and developing onboarding materials for both hosts and youth about how to live together. In addition, some CoCs faced challenges identifying and engaging potential hosts, a situation exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, when people were reluctant to open their homes to those they did not know.

**Rapid Rehousing**

In 2021, rapid rehousing was available to youth in the majority of CoCs across groups, with 83 percent of non-YHDP CoCs, and 100 percent of YHDP CoCs (Rounds 1-3) having rapid rehousing programs for youth. In fact, rapid rehousing was the most common housing model available to youth across CoCs in 2021.

***Rapid rehousing*** provides housing location and stabilization services to youth and young adults with time-limited rental assistance for market-rate housing.

Rapid rehousing is also the intervention that experienced the greatest growth over time among all three groups of CoCs. The

availability of rapid rehousing across all groups of CoCs increased significantly between 2019 and 2021 (exhibit 6), with increases ranging from 35–40 percent.

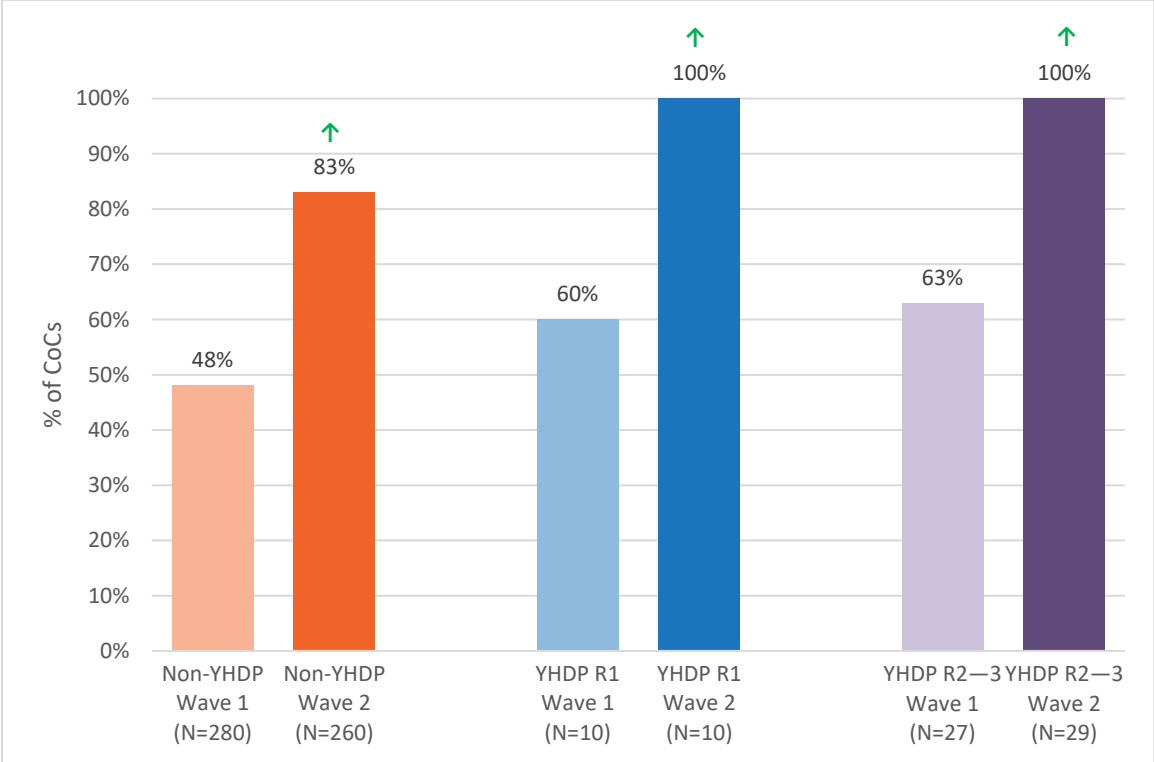
Among all three groups, CoCs had an average of 19 units of rapid rehousing for youth in 2021, but there were significant differences between YHDP CoCs and non-YHDP CoCs. Round 1 YHDP CoCs had an average of 147 units, Round 2 and 3 YHDP CoCs had an average of 60 units, and non-YHDP CoCs had an average of 12 units. Across all three groups, 30 percent of CoCs had rapid rehousing designated for specific subpopulations of youth, most often for pregnant and parenting youth, but also, in some CoCs, for LGBTQ youth or youth aging out of foster care.

Despite the increased housing resources among CoCs, survey respondents from both YHDP and non-YHDP CoCs reported they struggled to find stable housing for youth. Challenges included limited affordable housing stock and landlords reluctant to rent to youth, especially youth who were unemployed or had limited rental histories, criminal records, or histories of property damage or eviction.

**Permanent supportive housing** provides youth with non-time-limited housing assistance with wraparound supportive services.

**Other permanent housing**, including the Family Unification Program, Foster Youth to Independence vouchers, and other subsidized housing programs, typically provide youth with non-time-limited housing assistance, sometimes with supportive services.

**Exhibit 6. Percentage of CoCs with Rapid Rehousing for Youth**



YHDP = Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program.  
 Note: Arrows indicate statistically significant increase (↑).  
 Source: 2019 and 2021 Survey of CoCs conducted for the YHDP Evaluation

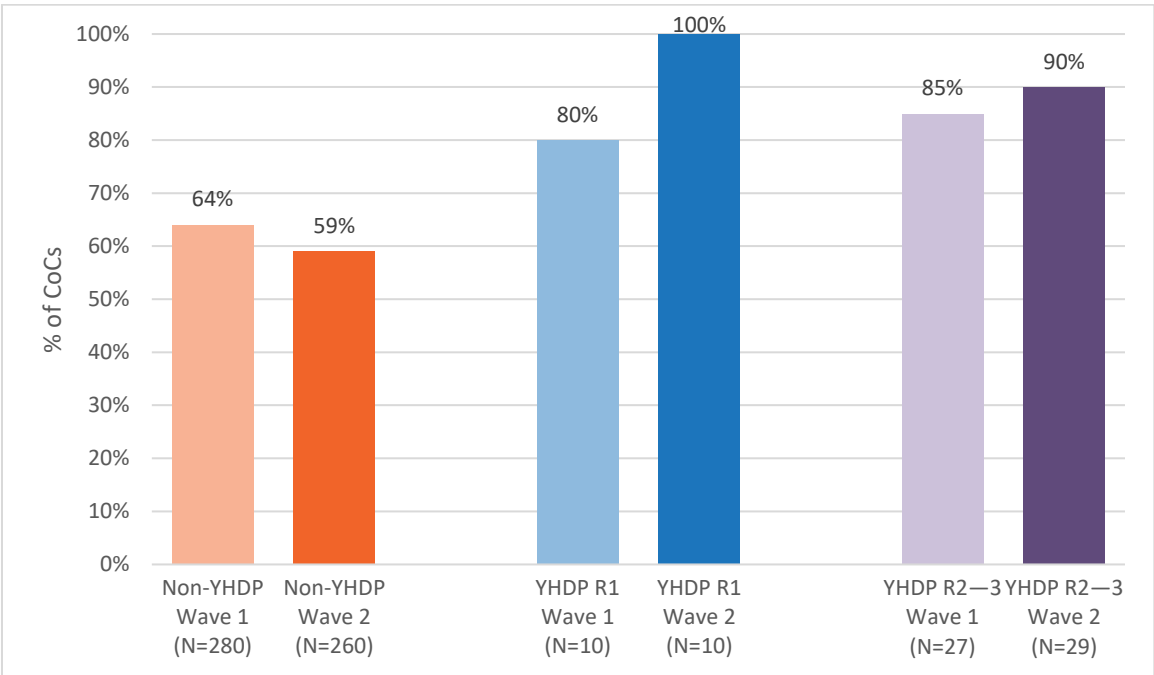
**Permanent Supportive Housing/Other Permanent Housing**

As exhibit 7 shows, in 2021, permanent supportive housing and other permanent housing were more common among Round 1 YHDP CoCs and Round 2 and 3 YHDP CoCs than among non-YHDP CoCs. Between 2019 and 2021, a greater percentage of YHDP CoCs began implementing this model for youth, with Round 1 YHDP CoCs increasing from 80

percent to 100 percent and Round 2 and 3 CoCs increased from 85 to 90 percent across the 2 years. Yet, during the same period there was a small, non-significant decrease in the percentage of non-YHDP CoCs with permanent supportive housing or other permanent housing for youth from 64 to 59 percent of CoCs.

Nationwide, CoCs had an average of 14 permanent supportive housing or other permanent housing beds specifically for youth, and one-quarter of CoCs had beds designated for subpopulations, including youth aging out of foster care and youth with mental health or substance abuse disorders.

**Exhibit 7. Percentage of CoCs with Permanent Supportive Housing/Other Permanent Housing for Youth**



YHDP = Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program.  
 Source: 2019 and 2021 Survey of CoCs conducted for the YHDP Evaluation

**Homeless Services and Supports**

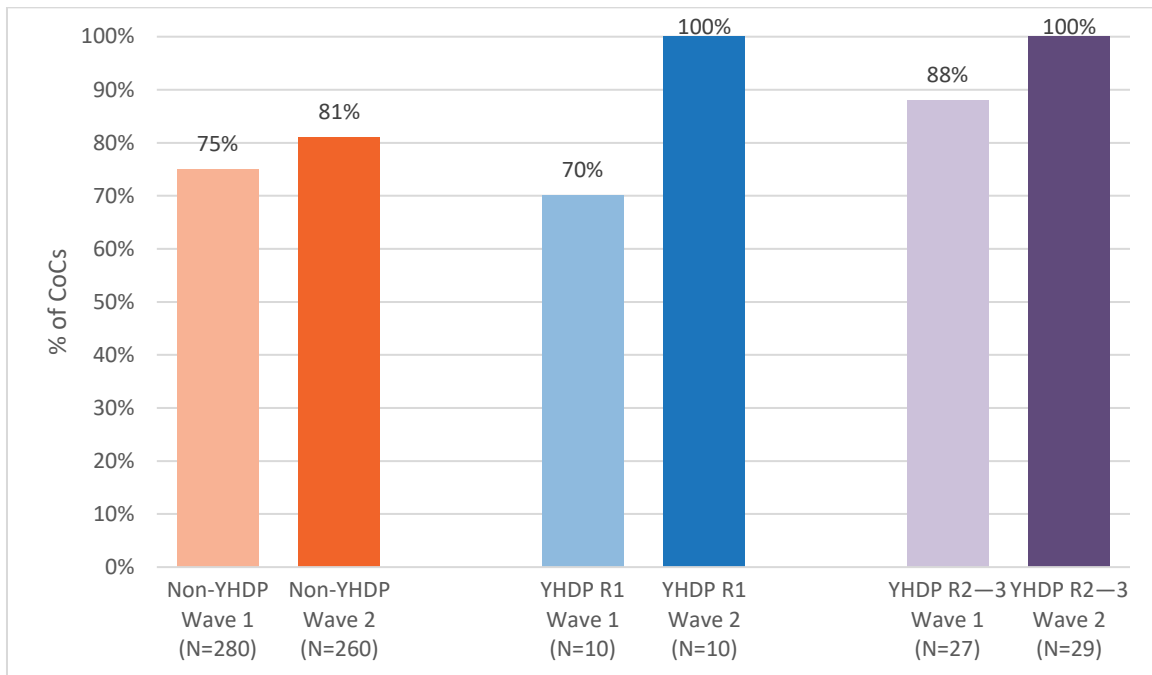
**Outreach**

Outreach services for youth were available in 75 percent of non-YHDP CoCs, compared with 70 percent of Round 1 YHDP CoCs and 88 percent of Round 2 and 3 YHDP CoCs (exhibit 8). Over the 2 years studied, CoCs in all three groups added outreach services to their systems, and by 2021, over 80 percent of non-YHDP CoCs and all YHDP CoCs offered outreach services for youth.

***Outreach services*** identify and engage youth/young adults at risk of or experiencing homelessness and connect them with assistance. They can include street outreach teams, mobile vans, school-based outreach, and websites or other technology.



**Exhibit 8. Percentage of CoCs with Outreach Services for Youth**

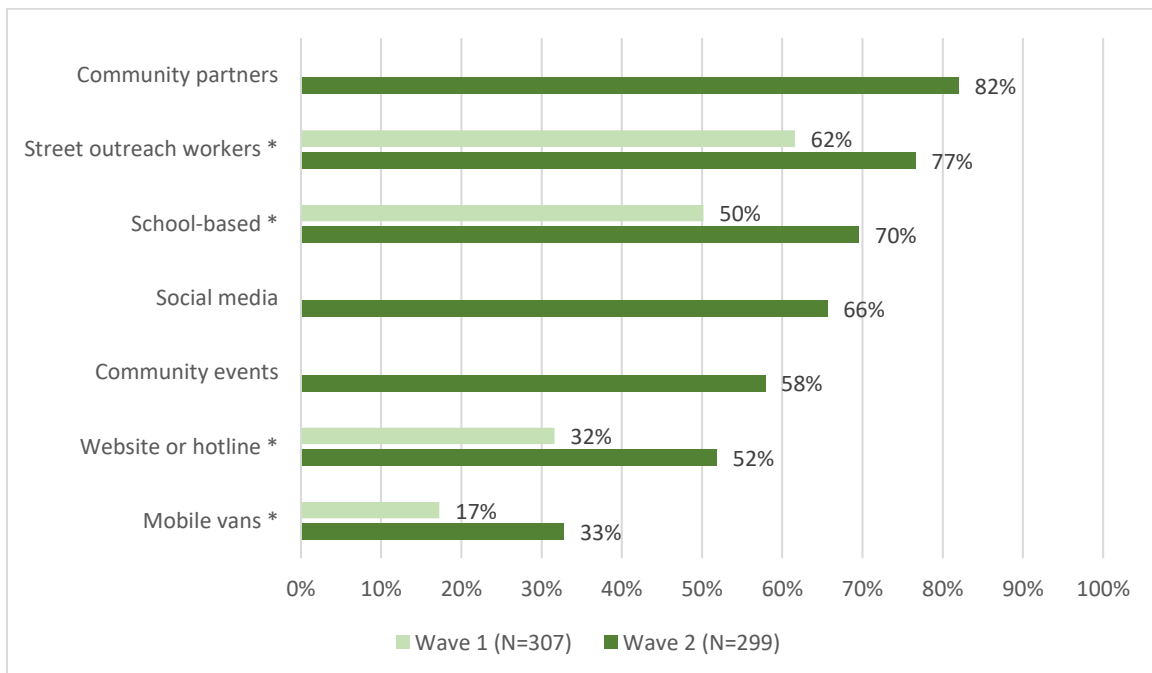


YHDP = Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program.

Source: 2019 and 2021 Survey of CoCs conducted for the YHDP Evaluation

CoCs use multiple outreach strategies to reach youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Exhibit 9 shows the most common types of youth-specific outreach services across both YHDP CoCs and non-YHDP CoCs at each survey wave. All services measured at each time-point showed statistical increases in the number of CoCs offering them.

**Exhibit 9. Types of Youth-Specific Outreach Services Available in CoCs Nationally**



\* Indicates statistically significant increase over time.

Note: Outreach through community partners, social media, and community events was not measured in 2019.

Source: 2019 and 2021 Survey of CoCs conducted for the YHDP Evaluation

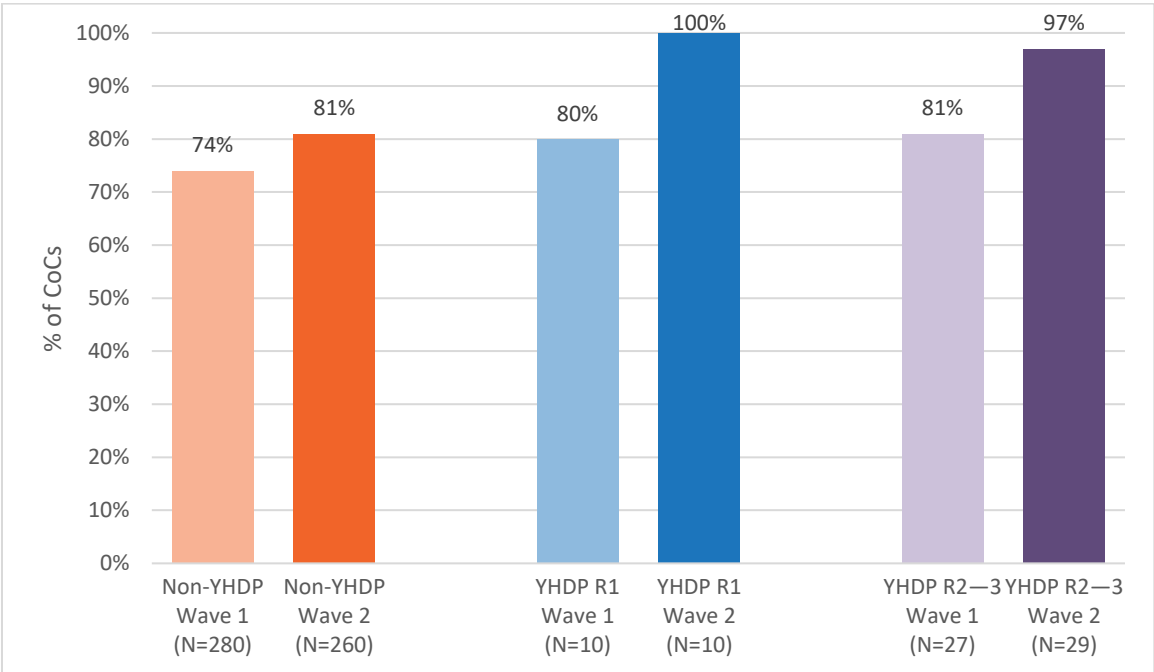
In 2021, the most common types of outreach services were outreach through community partners (82 percent), street outreach workers (77 percent), and school-based outreach (70 percent). Most services were offered to youth over the age of 18, except for school-based outreach, which was available to youth under age 18. Despite most sites having outreach services in place, in 2021, only 20–30 percent of CoCs nationally reported that demand for each type of outreach service was met.

**Coordinated Entry**

Coordinated entry systems for youth, available in more than three-quarters of CoCs in 2019, became more common over time among both YHDP and non-YHDP CoCs. By 2021, 81 percent of non-YHDP CoCs had coordinated entry systems for youth in place, an increase from 74 percent in 2019. During the same period, Round 1 YHDP CoCs increased from 80 to 100 percent, and Round 2 and 3 YHDP CoCs increased from 81 to 97 percent (exhibit 10). Developments in coordinated entry for youth during this period were not limited to YHDP CoCs, yet many of the YHDP sites used demonstration resources to either develop or improve upon their coordinated entry systems for youth by adding additional access points, increasing the number of youth-specific assessors, and developing new methods for connecting youth to the system.

**Coordinated entry** is defined as a process that ensures that all youth/young adults experiencing homelessness or other housing crises are quickly identified, assessed, referred, and connected with housing and homeless assistance in a coordinated manner.

**Exhibit 10. Percentage of CoCs with Coordinated Entry for Youth**



YHDP = Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program.  
 Source: 2019 and 2021 Survey of CoCs conducted for the YHDP Evaluation

As shown in exhibit 11, in 2021, for the majority of CoCs across the country, coordinated entry for youth entailed multiple points of entry, including both in-person and telephone-based options. The percentage of CoCs with telephone-based entries increased significantly between 2019 and 2021, likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As of 2021, about one-half of CoCs

nationally had access points specific to youth and provided navigation or case management assistance specific to youth. Both of these features became more common over time.

**Exhibit 11. Characteristics of Coordinated Entry Across all CoCs Nationally**

	2019 (N=307) (%)	2021 (N=299) (%)
<b>Points of entry</b>		
In-person	63	71
Telephone-based	46	68***
Other	15	3
<b>Number of points of entry</b>		
One	8	9
Multiple	55	62
<b>Access points specific to youth</b>	44	57**
<b>Case management/navigation specific to youth</b>	41	53*
<b>Populations served</b>		
Youth under 18	37	36
Youth 18–24	73	82
HUD Category 1	72	81
HUD Category 2	55	67
HUD Category 3	38	52
HUD Category 4	70	79
Other	5	4
<b>Use an assessment tool</b>	72	76
TAY VI-SPDAT/Next Step Tool	36	43
VI-SPDAT	34	36
Family VI-SPDAT	27	27
Community created assessment tool	18	23
Other	6	10*
<b>Use of assessment tools</b>		
Prioritization	--	74
Making housing referrals	67	73
Making service referrals	53	54
Accessing shelter	33	30
Other	6	5
<b>Participate in case conferencing for youth</b>	--	68

Notes: \* = p<.05; \*\* = p<.01; \*\*\* = p<.001.

Source: 2019 and 2021 Survey of CoCs conducted for the YHDP Evaluation

In 2021, across CoCs, more than 80 percent served youth aged 18–24 years old, but only about one-third also served youth under 18<sup>4</sup>. Most CoCs served youth in HUD homelessness categories 1 (literally homeless) and 4 (fleeing domestic violence), with smaller percentages also serving youth in categories 2 (imminently homeless) and 3 (homeless under other statutes).

As of 2021, nearly three-quarters of CoCs nationally use assessment tools—most commonly the TAY VI-SPDAT or VI-SPDAT<sup>5</sup>—primarily for prioritization and to make referrals to housing or services. Fewer than one-third of CoCs used the assessment tool to connect youth

<sup>4</sup> Site visit data indicate that CoCs that do not serve youth under 18 through coordinated entry instead refer those youth to other systems (e.g., child welfare, education) for assistance.

<sup>5</sup> The Transition Age Youth—Vulnerability Index Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (TAY-VISPDAT), also called the Next Step Tool for Homeless Youth, is a screening tool used by CoCs to assess the needs and eligibility for homelessness assistance. The VI-SPDAT is a version of the tool that is not tailored for youth.

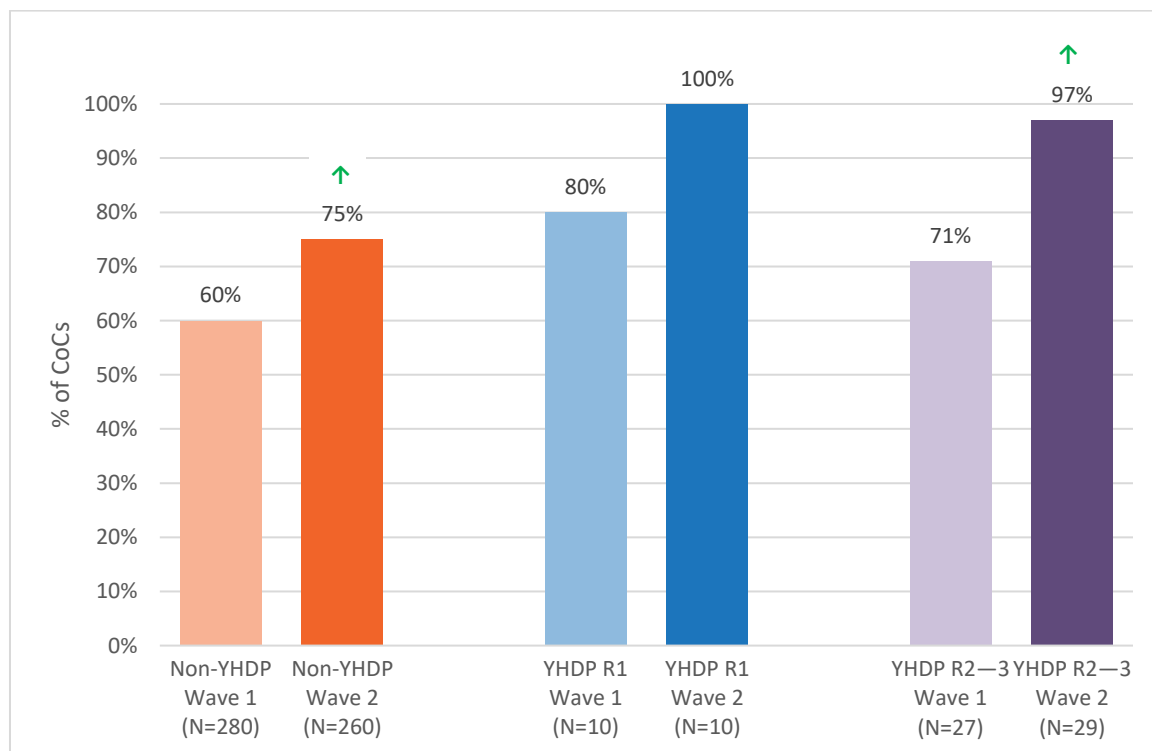
with emergency shelter, possibly because the remaining CoCs do not have youth-specific shelter or because shelter youth can access emergency shelter directly, without first receiving a coordinated entry assessment. As of 2021, two-thirds of CoCs (68 percent) participated in case conferencing for youth.

### Homelessness Prevention

By 2021, 75 percent of the non-YHDP CoCs, 100 percent of the Round 1 YHDP CoCs, and 97 percent of Round 2 and 3 YHDP CoCs had homelessness prevention assistance for youth in place. As exhibit 12 shows, all three groups experienced increases since 2019, with significant changes in non-YHDP CoCs (from 60 to 75 percent) and Round 2 and 3 YHDP CoCs (from 71 to 97 percent). It is important to note that YHDP funding cannot be used for prevention services, which are limited to youth who are experiencing homelessness under HUD’s homeless definition. Other changes that resulted from the demonstration, however, such as increased cross-sector coordination, may have increased the availability of prevention services for youth at risk of homelessness.

**Homelessness prevention** services are defined as supportive services and/or rental assistance to prevent homelessness for at risk youth.

**Exhibit 12. Percentage of CoCs with Prevention Services for Youth**



YHDP = Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program.

Note: Arrows indicate statistically significant increase (↑).

Source: 2019 and 2021 Survey of CoCs conducted for the YHDP Evaluation

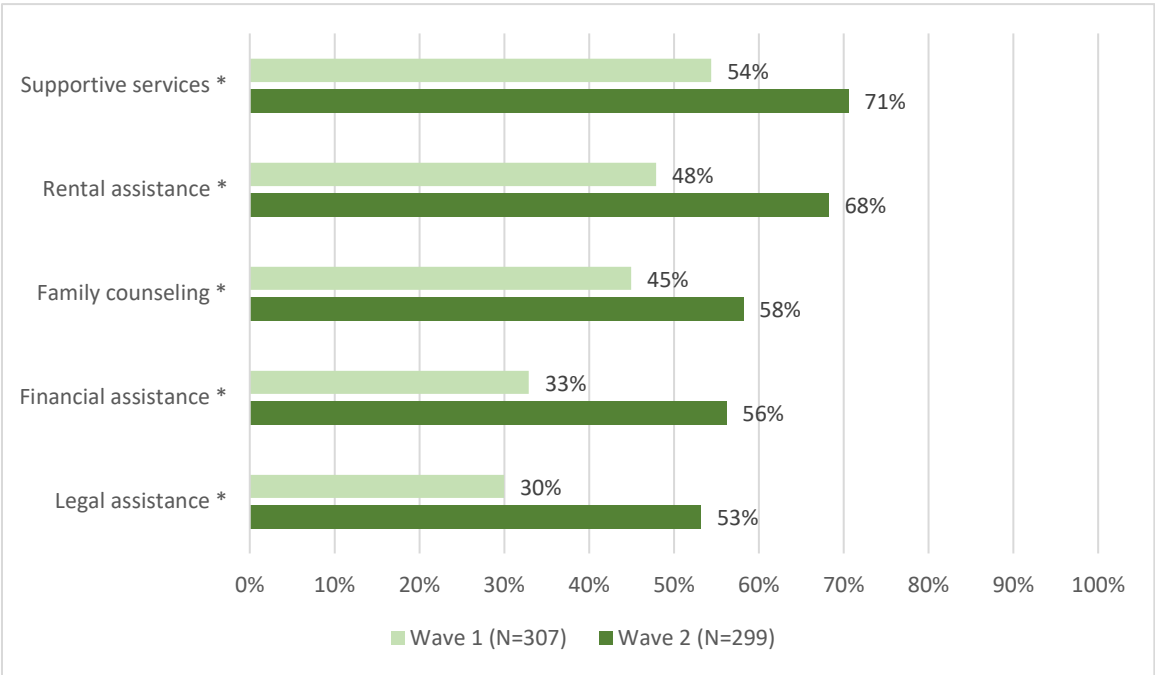
As exhibit 13 shows, the most common types of homelessness prevention services available to youth across both YHDP and non-YHDP CoCs included the provision of supportive services<sup>6</sup> (71 percent), rental assistance (68 percent), and family counseling or mediation (58

<sup>6</sup> Supportive services are generally considered to be a system of social or health services provided by government or community-based organizations intended to help individuals address barriers to housing access and stability, such as case management, life skills, physical health services, mental health services, and chemical dependency services. These services could include, but are not limited to, family counseling and legal assistance.

percent). All types of prevention services became more common between 2019 and 2021. Supportive services and family counseling were generally available to all youth; however, rental and financial assistance and legal assistance were primarily available to youth who were 18 and older.

For each of these types of homelessness prevention services, fewer than one-third of CoCs reported having sufficient capacity to meet the demand in the community.

**Exhibit 13. Types of Youth-Specific Prevention Services Available in CoCs Nationally**



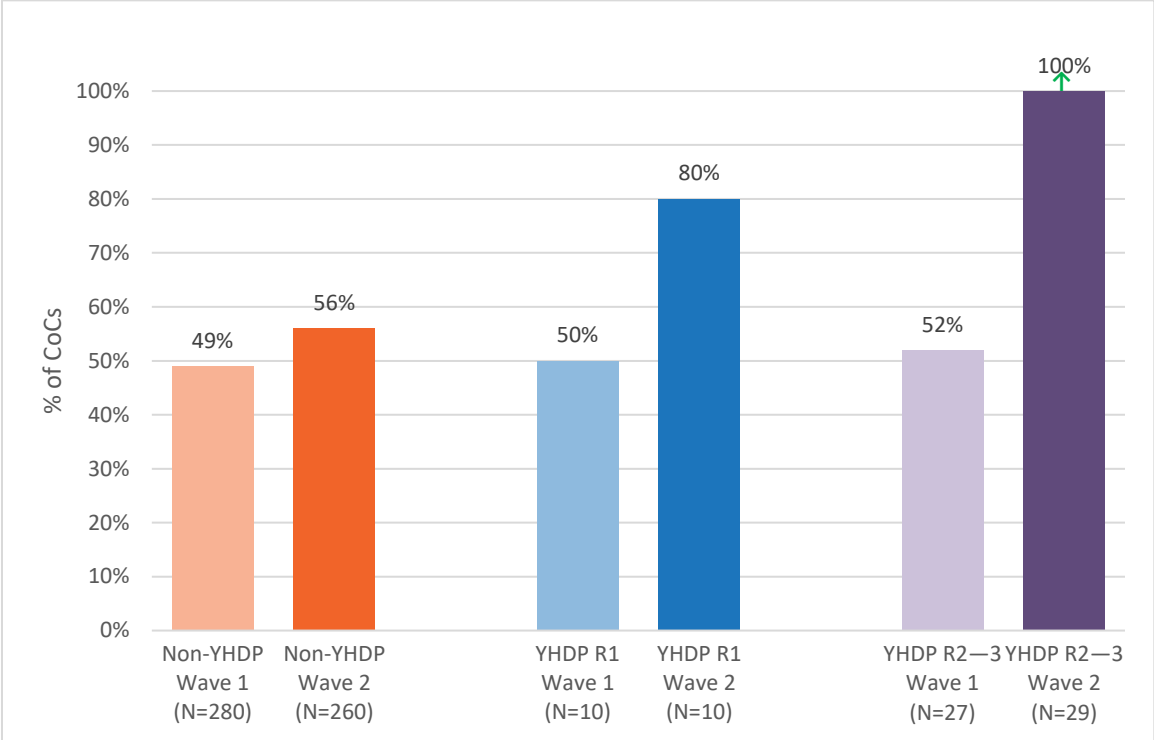
\* Indicates statistically significant increase over time.  
 Source: 2019 and 2021 Survey of CoCs conducted for the YHDP Evaluation

**Diversion**

As exhibit 14 shows, diversion services were available in only about one-half of all CoCs in 2019, making it one of the least commonly available services for youth. Over the 2 years examined, YHDP sites realized large increases in the use of diversion services, increasing to 80 percent of YHDP Round 1 CoCs and all Round 2 and 3 CoCs by 2021. Few additional non-YHDP sites, however, added diversion services to their portfolios during that 2-year period, increasing to 56 percent in 2021.

*Diversion* involves a focus on problem-solving and often short- to medium-term financial assistance and/or supportive services to divert youth/young adults from entering shelter or other homelessness assistance programs. Although both prevention services and diversion are aimed at helping youth from entering the homeless system, prevention services are aimed at youth at risk of homelessness, whereas diversion is often provided to youth who are already experiencing homelessness.

**Exhibit 14. Percentage of CoCs with Diversion Services for Youth**



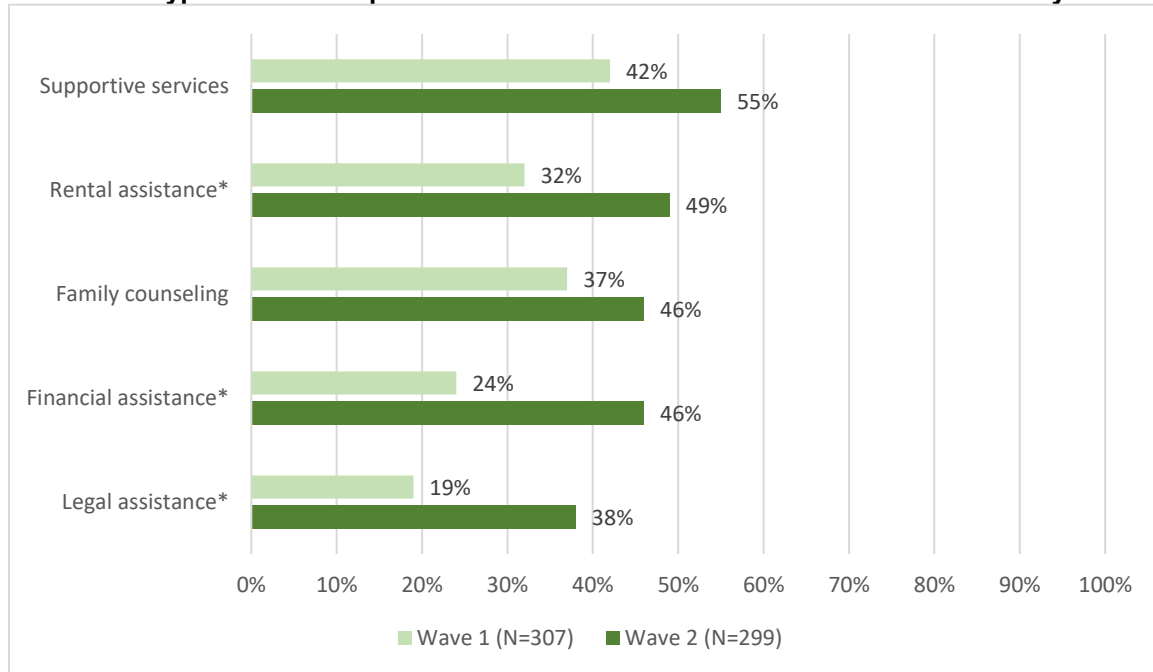
YHDP = Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program.

Note: Arrow indicates statistically significant increase (↑).

Source: 2019 and 2021 Survey of CoCs conducted for the YHDP Evaluation

Across all CoCs, the most common youth-specific diversion services in 2021 included supportive services (71 percent), rental assistance (68 percent), and family counseling/intervention services (58 percent) (exhibit 15). There were nonsignificant increases in the percentage of CoCs offering all of these services to youth between 2019 and 2020. Less than one-fifth of CoCs providing diversion services reported having sufficient capacity of each of these types of assistance to meet the needs of youth in their community.

**Exhibit 15. Types of Youth-Specific Diversion Services Available in CoCs Nationally**



\* Indicates statistically significant increase over time.

Source: 2019 and 2021 Survey of CoCs conducted for the YHDP Evaluation

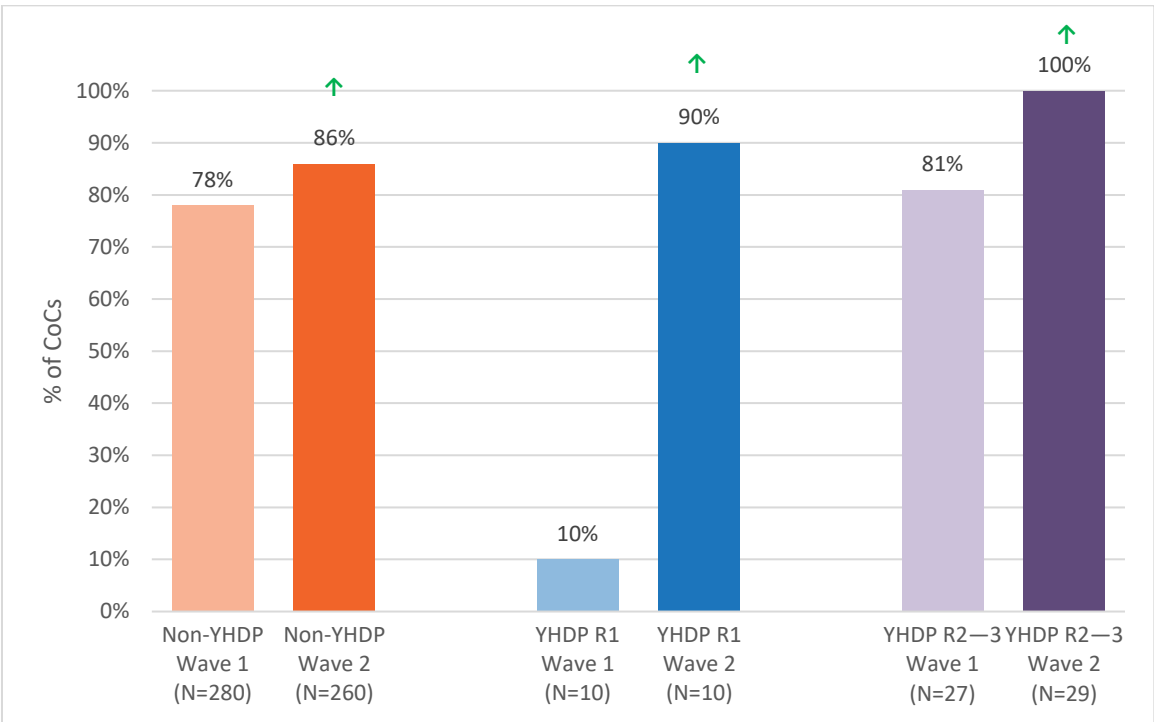
### Navigation/Case Management

Throughout the evaluation, youth consistently cited navigators or case managers as a critical and essential support for making plans to reach their goals, accessing needed services, and finding housing and jobs.

**Navigation/case management** is support provided by an individual assigned through a homelessness provider who meets with youth to help connect them to housing and services.

As exhibit 16 shows, in 2019, about 80 percent of non-YHDP CoCs and Round 2 and 3 YHDP CoCs indicated they had this assistance in place, and in both groups, additional CoCs implemented the support over time, with 86 percent of non-YHDP CoCs and 100 percent of Round 2 and 3 YHDP CoCs offering the assistance by 2021. In contrast, in 2019, only 10 percent of Round 1 YHDP CoCs had navigation/case management assistance in place for youth, increasing to 90 percent in 2021. However, the researchers suggest caution in interpreting differences between the percentage of CoCs across the three groups reporting having navigation/case management services in place in 2019. In 2019, case management assistance provided through homelessness programs, such as emergency shelter or rapid rehousing, was available for youth in all 10 Round 1 YHDP CoCs, whereas only one site offered navigation assistance separate from other homelessness programs. It is not clear if survey respondents in non-YHDP CoCs or Round 2 and 3 YHDP CoCs made this same distinction in types of navigation/case management assistance in 2019.

**Exhibit 16. Percentage of CoCs with Navigation/Case Management Services for Youth**



YHDP = Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program.

Note: Arrows indicate statistically significant increase (↑).

Source: 2019 and 2021 Survey of CoCs conducted for the YHDP Evaluation

Navigation assistance, independent of case management in other homelessness assistance programs, became more widely available in the Round 1 YHDP CoCs during the demonstration. Eight of the 10 YHDP CoCs trained and funded mobile, youth-specific navigators who helped youth find available services, housing, and supports to meet their needs, such that by 2021, this model was in place in 90 percent of Round 1 YHDP CoCs.

### Level of Development in Youth-Focused Systems

To better understand the extent to which CoCs developed their youth homeless systems over time, the research team categorized CoCs into three broad categories of development based on the array of housing and services available for youth in 2019 and 2021:

- **High development.** CoCs had in place some level of outreach services, coordinated entry systems focused on or inclusive of youth populations, crisis and permanent housing interventions specifically for youth, and other assistance such as prevention, family interventions, and employment.
- **Medium development.** CoCs had youth-specific outreach, coordinated entry systems, and crisis and permanent housing interventions, but generally had fewer other youth-specific services than highly developed sites.
- **Early development.** CoCs had limited outreach services available, coordinated entry systems that were nascent or under development, and few youth-specific crisis and permanent housing interventions.

As shown in exhibit 17, both non-YHDP CoCs and YHDP CoCs increased their level of development over time with a greater percentage of YHDP sites becoming highly developed



than non-YHDP sites. In 2019, 25 percent of non-YHDP CoCs had highly developed youth systems, 37 percent had a medium level of development, and the remaining 38 percent were in early stages of development. Among the Round 1 YHDP CoCs, the rates were comparable to non-YHDP sites, with three sites each in the high and medium categories and four sites in early development. In contrast, more than one-half of the Round 2 and 3 YHDP CoCs were highly developed in 2019, and about one-quarter were in medium and early stages.

**Exhibit 17. Level of Development of CoC**

	Non-YHDP		YHDP Round 1		YHDP Round 2 & 3	
	2019 (N=280) (%)	2021 (N=260) (%)	2019 (N=10) (%)	2021 (N=10) (%)	2019 (N=27) (%)	2021 (N=29) (%)
High Development	25	34	30	100	52	79
Medium Development	37	47	30	0	26	17
Early Development	38	19	40	0	22	3

YHDP = Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program  
 Source: 2019 and 2021 Survey of CoCs conducted for YHDP Evaluation

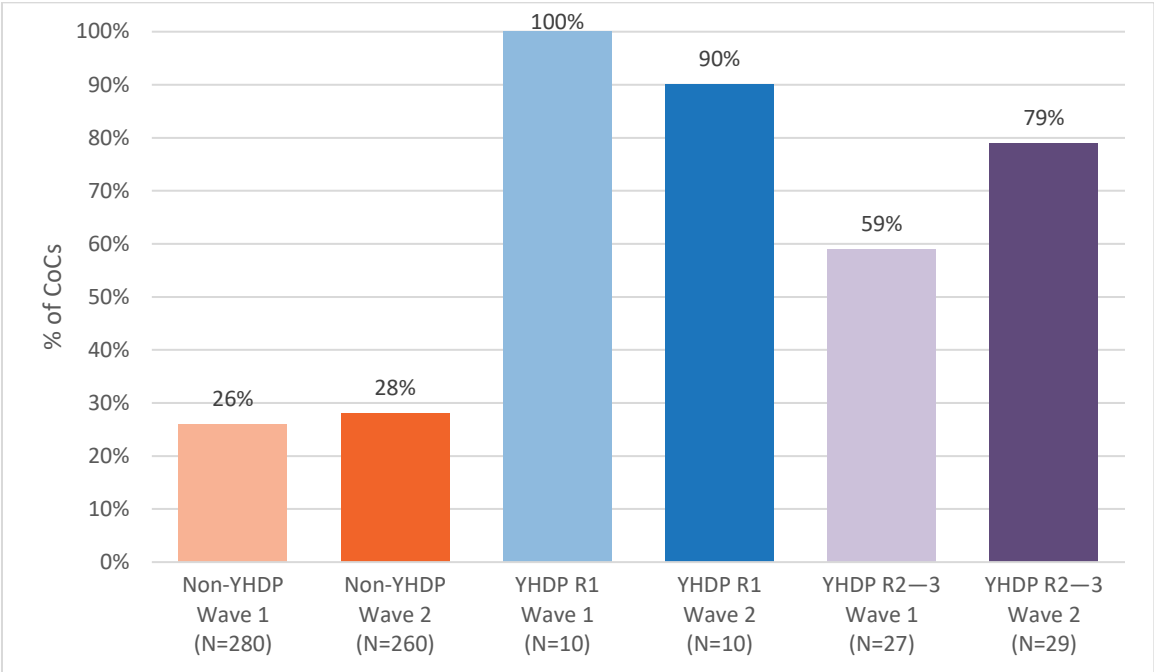
By 2021, about one-third of the non-YHDP CoCs were found to have highly developed youth service systems; 47 percent had medium developed systems; and 19 percent were in the early stages of development. In contrast, all Round 1 YHDP CoCs became highly developed sites, and the majority (79 percent) of Round 2 and 3 YHDP CoCs became highly developed, with less than one-fifth remaining in medium or early stages of development.

**Youth-Specific Governance and Planning**

CoCs with youth-specific governance structures and planning are able to provide greater focus on youth needs and to design and implement services and housing that are tailored to those needs. As exhibits 18 and 19 demonstrate, in 2019, only 26 percent of non-YHDP CoCs had a youth-specific governance structure in place, and 47 percent had strategic plans in place specific to or encompassing youth. Between 2019 and 2021, non-YHDP CoCs experienced little change in these areas.

In contrast, all of the Round 1 YHDP CoCs had youth-specific governance structures and strategic plans for youth in place in 2019. All 10 sites had youth-specific plans in 2021, and 9 of 10 CoCs maintained youth-specific governance at the end of the demonstration. As required by the YHDP Notice of Funding Opportunities (NOFO), each CoC’s coordinated community plan outlined a governance structure responsible for guiding decisionmaking throughout the demonstration. These governing bodies were generally composed of representatives from local government, youth and nonyouth homeless services providers, behavioral health providers, child welfare agencies, school districts, and youth with lived experience. In most sites, this leadership remained relatively consistent over the course of the demonstration, despite challenges posed by COVID-19, stretched stakeholder capacity, and reduced engagement of youth and other partners.

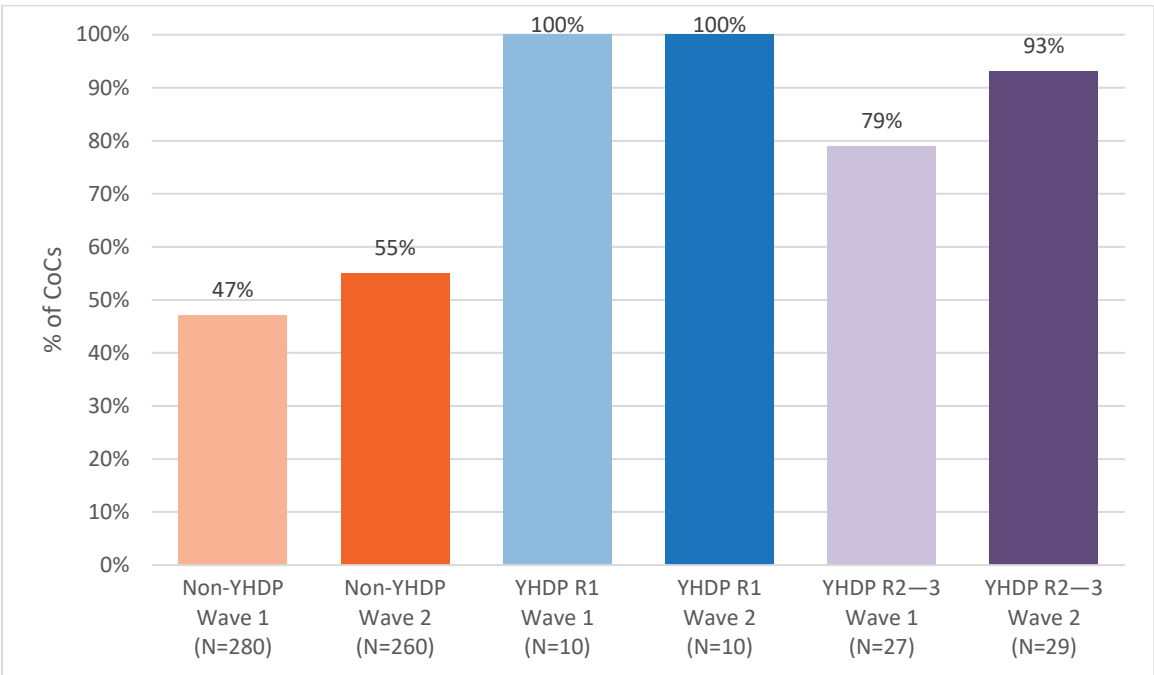
**Exhibit 18. Percentage of CoCs with Youth-Specific Governance**



YHDP = Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program.  
 Source: 2019 and 2021 Survey of CoCs conducted for the YHDP Evaluation

While not as common as in Round 1 CoCs, the majority of Round 2 and 3 YHDP CoCs also had youth governance structures (59 percent in 2019) and strategic plans (79 percent in 2019) in place, with increases over time in both to 79 and 93 percent, respectively. The lower rates among Round 2 and 3 YHDP CoCs, as compared to Round 1 YHDP CoCs, are likely due to the timing of the survey waves. At the time of the 2019 survey, Round 1 and Round 2 YHDP CoCs had received their awards and begun their planning activities. Round 3 CoCs had not yet been selected. By 2021, all three groups of YHDP CoCs were implementing the demonstration, but the earlier rounds had more time to develop and implement their governance structures and strategic plans.

**Exhibit 19. Percentage of CoCs with Strategic Plans for Youth**



YHDP = Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program.  
 Source: 2019 and 2021 Survey of CoCs conducted for the YHDP Evaluation

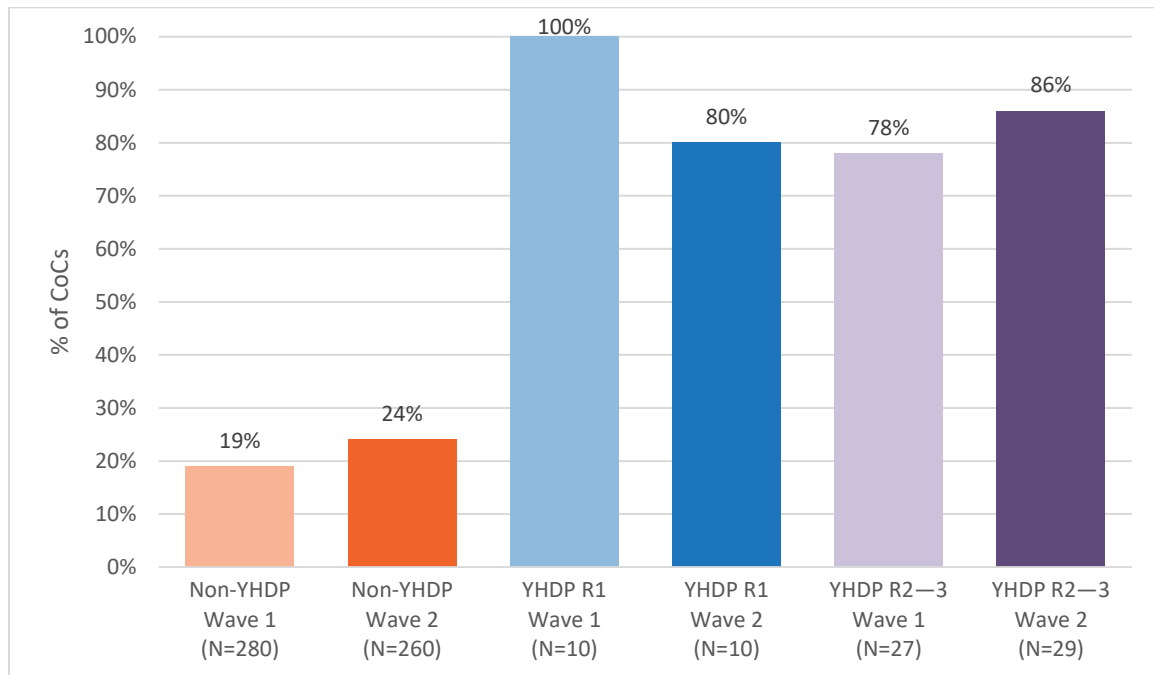
**Youth Engagement in the CoCs**

Youth engagement in the planning and implementation of homeless systems aims to ensure that the services and housing available meet the needs and desires of youth. In both 2019 and 2021, fewer than one-quarter of non-YHDP CoCs had youth participating in Youth Action Boards (YABs), CoC decisionmaking, or other youth involvement activities (exhibits 20–22), although a significant increase occurred between 2019 and 2020 (from 12 to 20 percent) in the percentage of non-YHDP CoCs including youth in CoC decisionmaking.

Youth engagement was a critical and required component of CoC participation in the demonstration. Accordingly, the majority of Round 1 YHDP CoCs had established YABs at both time points, 40 percent had youth involved in CoC decisionmaking, and 30 percent engaged youth in other ways. Fewer Round 1 YHDP CoCs had YABs in 2021 than in 2019 due to difficulties maintaining active YABs through the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. In interviews with YAB members from the 10 Round 1 YHDP CoCs, members reported playing an active role in providing input into the design and implementation of YHDP plans and funded projects. In most sites, youth also engaged in a range of other activities within their CoCs, such as participating in Youth Counts<sup>7</sup>; soliciting input from other youth in the system; participating in presentations at community events and panels; organizing and hosting community events for youth; collecting input from non-YAB-involved youth; developing social media; and participating in outreach activities.

<sup>7</sup> Youth Counts are initiatives by CoCs to tailor the existing HUD Point-in-Time Count to better target and identify youth experiencing homelessness.

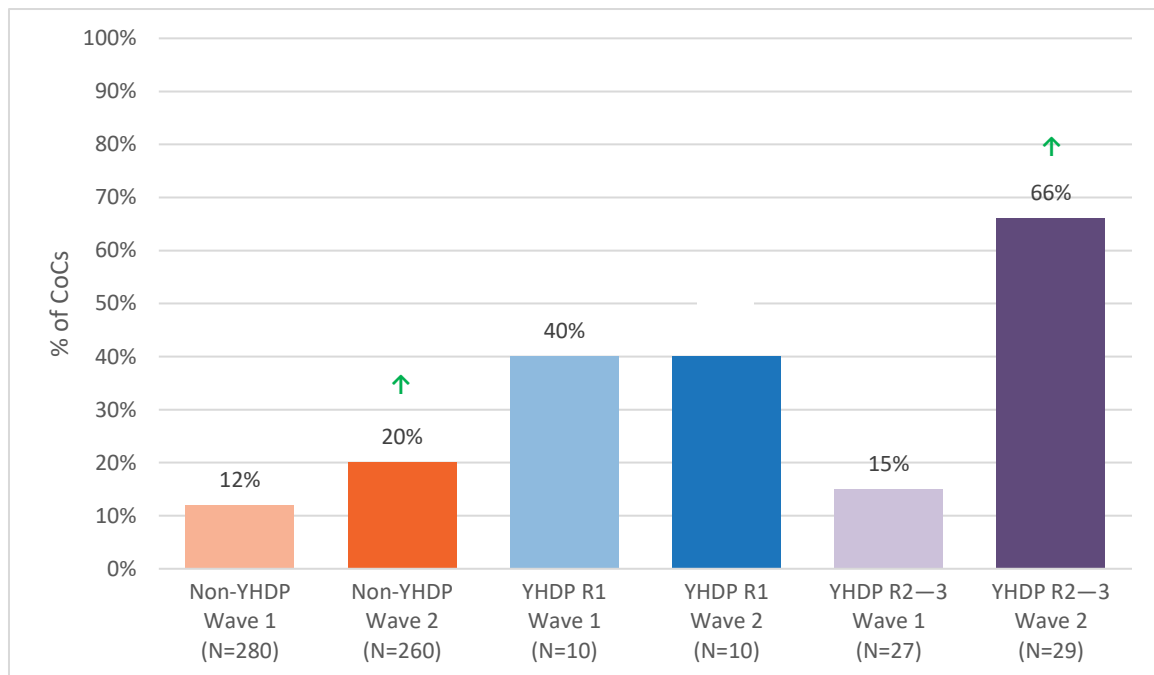
**Exhibit 20. Percentage of CoCs with Youth Action Boards**



YHDP = Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program.

Source: 2019 and 2021 Survey of CoCs conducted for the YHDP Evaluation

**Exhibit 21. Percentage of CoCs with Youth Participating in CoC Decisionmaking**



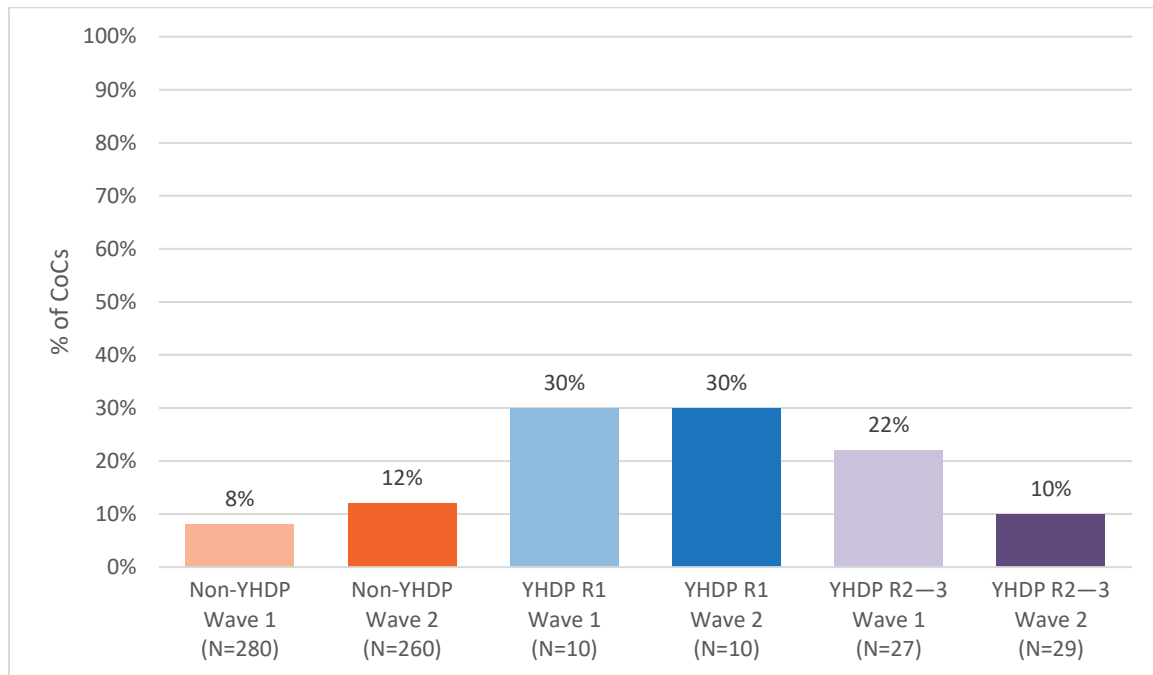
YHDP = Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program.

Note: Arrows indicate statistically significant increase (↑).

Source: 2019 and 2021 Survey of CoCs conducted for the YHDP Evaluation

Youth engagement in Round 2 and 3 YHDP CoCs was also high in both 2019 and 2021, with the percentage of CoCs with YABs increasing from 78 to 86 percent, the percentage of CoCs engaging youth in CoC decisionmaking increasing from 15 to 66 percent, and the percentage of CoCs engaging youth in other ways between 15 and 22 percent.

**Exhibit 22. Percentage of CoCs with Other Types of Youth Involvement**



YHDP = Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program.  
 Source: 2019 and 2021 Survey of CoCs conducted for the YHDP Evaluation

**Cross-Systems Coordination**

Coordination between the youth homeless system and mainstream systems can help to identify youth in need of housing assistance and leverage other resources for housing and services. Both YHDP and non-YHDP CoCs coordinated with other systems that serve youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness, including child welfare, education, behavioral health, and juvenile justice systems (exhibits 23–26).

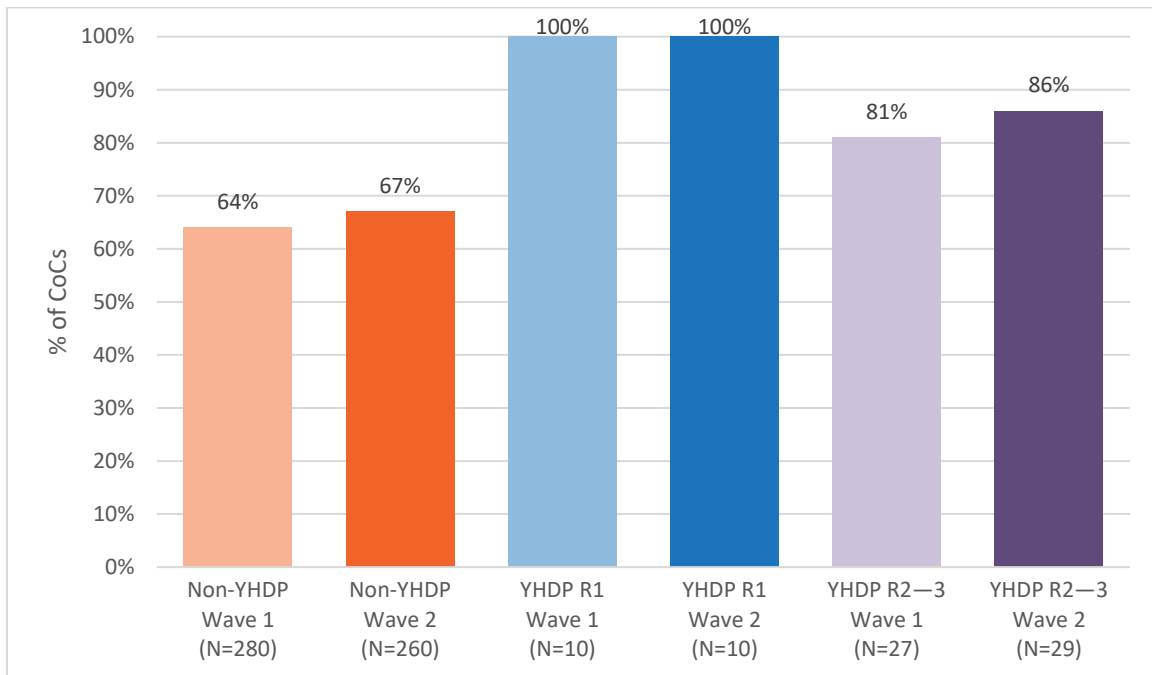
In 2019, the majority of non-YHDP CoCs coordinated with the child welfare, education, and behavioral health systems (with over 80 percent of CoCs coordinating with education systems). Less than one-third of the non-YHDP CoCs (28 percent), however, coordinated with juvenile justice systems. Non-YHDP CoCs showed little change in coordination with these systems over time.

YHDP CoCs tended to have higher levels of cross-system coordination in 2019 than non-YHDP CoCs and also showed slightly higher increases over time<sup>8</sup>. By 2021, all Round 1 YHDP CoCs and more than 80 percent of Round 2 and 3 YHDP CoCs coordinated with child welfare and education systems. Additionally, more than 70 percent of Rounds 1 through 3 YHDP CoCs coordinated with behavioral health agencies and juvenile justice systems (with the latter experiencing the greatest increase coordination over time).

Across both non-YHDP and YHDP CoCs, the common types of coordination with all mainstream systems included having representatives from these systems serving on the CoC; participating in systems planning; providing outreach, prevention, and diversion services; and providing housing assistance. With a few exceptions, smaller percentages of CoCs shared data or blended funding, although these two areas increased over time among YHDP sites.

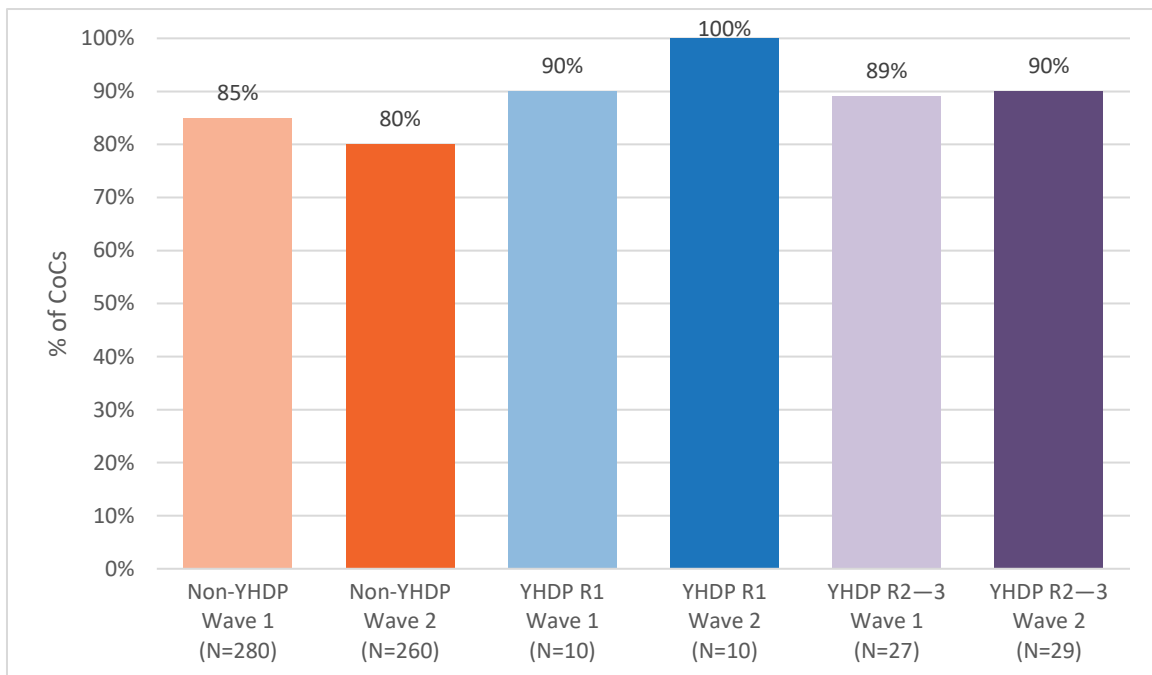
<sup>8</sup> At the time of the 2019 survey, YHDP CoCs, and Round 1 CoCs, in particular, had already engaged systems partners around their YHDP applications and community plans.

**Exhibit 23. Cross-System Coordination with Child Welfare**



YHDP = Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program.  
 Source: 2019 and 2021 Survey of CoCs conducted for the YHDP Evaluation

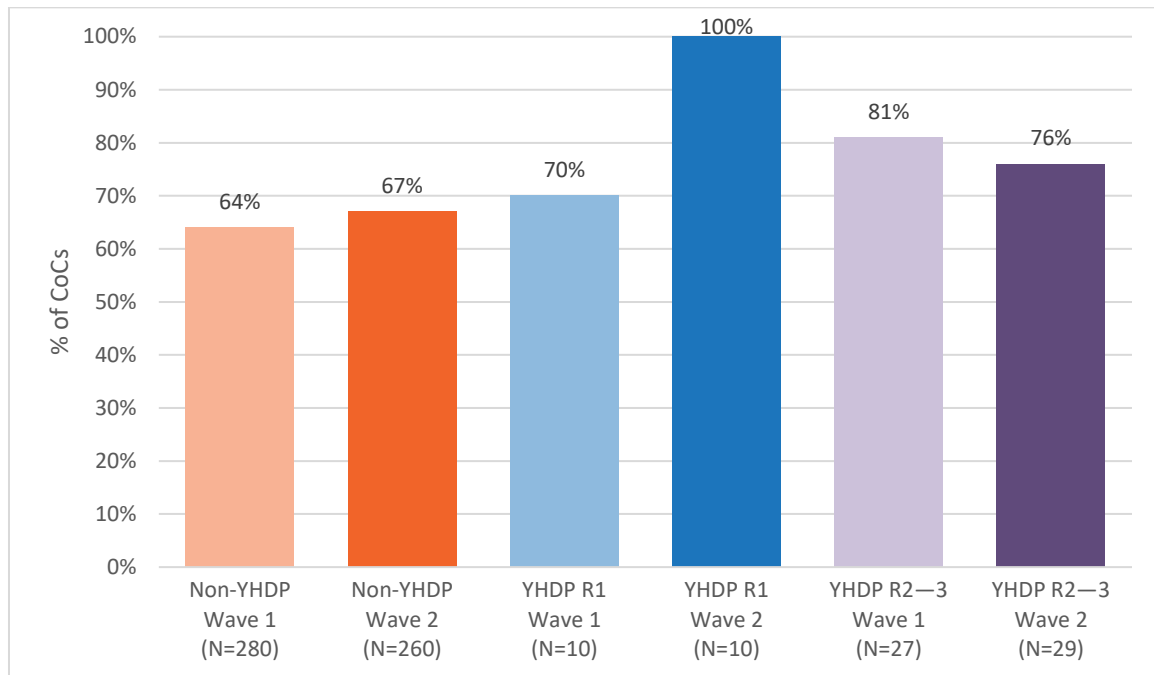
**Exhibit 24. Cross-System Coordination with Education**



YHDP = Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program.  
 Source: 2019 and 2021 Survey of CoCs conducted for the YHDP Evaluation

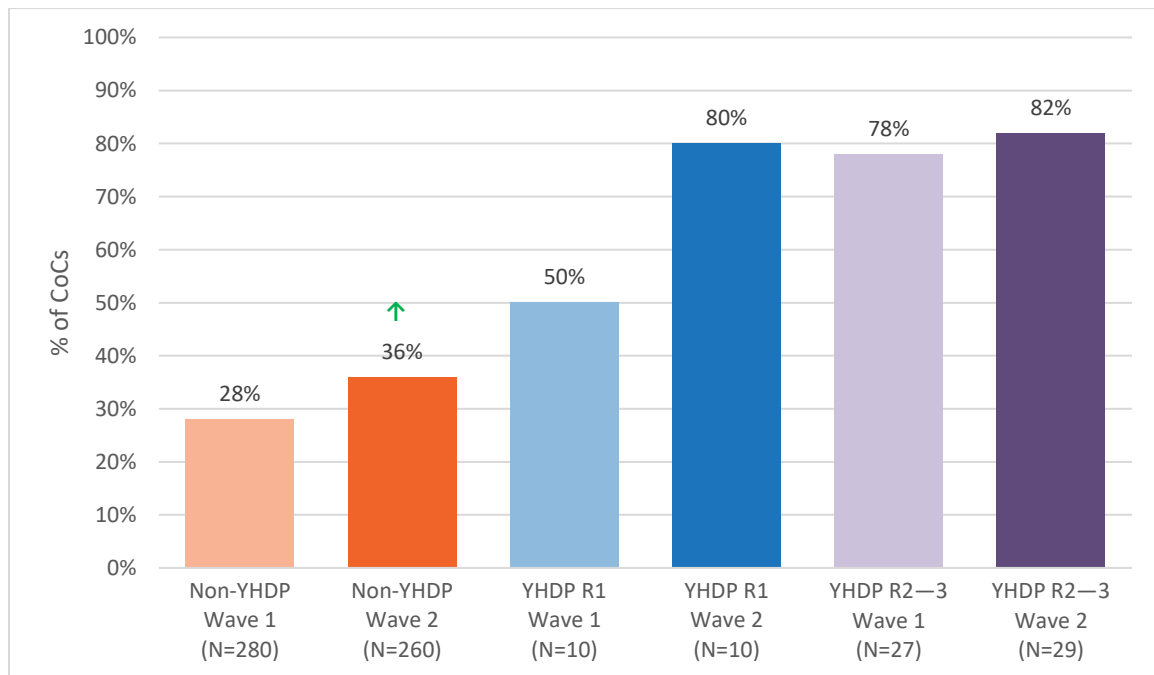
Across systems, the activities that increased the most over the course of the demonstration were often those related to sharing data, blending or braiding funding, participating in coordinated entry, and providing services and housing. The most common service-related activities across systems included referrals between homelessness providers and other systems and engagement in identification and outreach activities.

**Exhibit 25. Cross-System Coordination with Behavioral Health**



YHDP = Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program.  
 Source: 2019 and 2021 Survey of CoCs conducted for the YHDP Evaluation

**Exhibit 26. Cross-System Coordination with Juvenile Justice**



YHDP = Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program.  
 Note: Arrows indicate statistically significant increase (↑).  
 Source: 2019 and 2021 Survey of CoCs conducted for the YHDP Evaluation

Challenges to cross-system coordination revealed during site visits that likely affect all CoCs nationally include:

- Limitations in the bandwidth of a system, staff turnover, or competition with other priorities (i.e., high staff turnover, especially in child welfare agencies, necessitated

frequent efforts by the CoCs to connect with and train staff as well as orient them to the types of resources available to help youth).

- Differences in eligibility, definitions, and priorities (e.g., education systems use a broader definition of homelessness than is served by homelessness assistance programs, and child welfare and juvenile justice systems struggled to find housing for youth under 18 who are typically not eligible for the CoC's housing programs).
- Decentralized systems and many counties within a CoC (e.g., in an effort to coordinate with the child welfare system in the Ohio Balance of State, the CoC had to develop a separate Memorandum of Understanding with the child welfare agency in each of the five counties in the demonstration region).
- Delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e., CoC staff were often re-assigned to address pandemic-related initiatives, and some programs and other initiatives were harder to implement or were not viewed as a critical priority and placed on the back burner).

## Challenges in Implementing Youth Service Systems

Despite the progress made, in 2021, 70 percent of all CoCs continued to report challenges in developing and implementing services and supports for youth. Many of the challenges CoCs faced largely remained the same as those identified 2 years prior, but the proportion of CoCs noting that some challenges shifted over time.

As of 2021, 37 percent of CoCs reported a lack of sufficient resources to serve youth, a higher rate than in 2019; this is the most common challenge cited by CoCs. Resource constraints included a lack of resources for planning and building the necessary infrastructure, few or no youth-specific providers in their regions, and insufficient capacity among services and supports that do exist. One CoC cited, *“Lack of funding for youth specific programs and services, especially outreach and case management.”* Another noted, *“We are not adequately staffed, designed, or funded to give this issue the attention it needs. We want to... establish a network of services, but we simply have not been able to do so.”*

Additionally, one-quarter of CoCs noted their biggest challenges centered on the high cost of living, a lack of affordable housing, and limited education or employment opportunities for youth; many of these challenges were exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. One CoC representing a mid-sized city noted the biggest challenge as a *“lack of affordable housing in the community combined with gentrification, rapidly rising housing costs, and job loss/wage stagnation in key industries that employ young adults.”* Another noted that in expanding economies, youth are often left out. *“The rental unit stock is ever declining and youth and young adults are not competitive because of a lack of rental history and financial history.”*

In 2021, 13 percent of CoCs noted challenges understanding the scope of need and engaging youth in assistance, down from 29 percent in 2019. A few CoCs also noted improvements in their youth counts that helped them better understand the level of need in their communities, but others noted that their Point-in-Time (PIT) counts identified lower numbers of youth experiencing homelessness than they believed to be accurate. Other sites noted that once youth have been identified, engaging them in services can be challenging, especially without youth-specific providers. For example, one CoC responded, *“Engagement is a huge challenge as we often only have one or two interactions with a youth experiencing homelessness before we lose contact. Having more youth-specific services like a youth-specific shelter would be very helpful in engaging this population.”*



In 2021, 11 percent of CoCs noted challenges with coordination with different service systems that serve youth, such as child welfare, juvenile justice, and education, down from 17 percent in 2019. They attributed these challenges to a number of factors, including different definitions of homelessness, restrictions on how funding can be spent, and difficulty in sharing data across systems because of confidentiality issues. One site reported, *“It makes it hard to build connections with other critical partners when [the eligibility factors involved with funding] is the first issue brought forward.”*

Small percentages of CoCs (fewer than 10 percent) cited challenges, including insufficient mainstream services to address youth’s health and behavioral health challenges, difficulty engaging youth in CoC activities, and providers that are not trained or equipped to address the unique needs of youth.

## **Implications of Findings**

Results from the 2019 and 2021 surveys of CoCs nationwide indicate that CoCs are making strides in increasing system-level coordination of services and housing for homeless youth in their communities. By 2021, two-thirds of non-YHDP CoCs had coordinated entry systems with youth-specific policies or processes, as well as youth-specific prevention services, outreach, case management, crisis and permanent housing, and access to mainstream services (e.g., family intervention services, education and employment assistance, behavioral health services). Even without access to YHDP resources, over the 2-year period, non-YHDP CoCs were able to expand their prevention, case management, and rapid rehousing supports for youth, in particular.

The data also underscore how YHDP funding and technical assistance have helped CoCs strengthen their communities’ efforts to serve and house youth experiencing homelessness to a greater degree than CoCs that have not participated in the demonstration. Across all service areas, a higher proportion of YHDP-funded CoCs have every type of assistance in place than non-YHDP CoCs. Among the 10 Round 1 YHDP CoCs, 90 percent have each type of assistance for youth, with the exceptions of youth-specific diversion and host homes. Similarly, 90 percent or more of Round 2 and 3 YHDP CoCs have each type of assistance in place, except for emergency shelter and host homes. Crisis and permanent housing portfolios specifically for youth were expanded. Furthermore, the demonstration led to a notable increase in navigation, diversion, and other services tailored for youth.

Moreover, YHDP helped CoCs develop youth-specific governance and engage youth in decisionmaking to a greater extent than occurred in non-YHDP CoCs. YHDP also increased cross-system coordination across a range of activities, including involving representatives from other systems in CoC governance and planning, engaging in cross-system data sharing and blending or braiding funding, and providing services and housing.

Despite the progress made, both YHDP and non-YHDP CoCs reported facing challenges in serving youth experiencing homelessness, including insufficient funding for systems planning, few or no youth-specific providers, and insufficient capacity to serve the youth in need among the services and supports that are available. They cited the cost of living, limited affordable housing, and few economic opportunities for youth as barriers to moving youth to independence. They noted a need for improvements in efforts to identify youth and engage them in assistance, as well as better data to understand the scope of need. Finally, CoCs faced challenges coordinating with different service systems that serve youth and connecting youth to mainstream services due to different systems’ definitions of homelessness, restrictions on how

funding can be spent, and difficulty in sharing data across systems because of confidentiality issues.

These findings suggest that continued support from HUD, through financial and technical assistance, will continue to help strengthen the services and supports available for youth at risk of or experiencing homelessness nationally. In addition to awarding additional rounds of the demonstration, there are a range of activities HUD could implement to help all CoCs. For example, HUD can urge CoCs to prioritize the development of youth-specific governance structures and strategic plans and incentivize such activities through the NOFO. In addition, HUD could provide targeted funding to CoCs for youth-specific systems planning as well as for the involvement of youth in CoC activities.

Aside from funding, HUD can share some of the lessons learned from YHDP-funded CoCs with non-YHDP CoCs. For example, to help CoCs continue to develop and implement youth-specific housing and services, HUD can share strategies developed with YHDP support to identify and engage youth in assistance, develop assessment and prioritization tools, and design and implement crisis and permanent housing programs. To help support the engagement of youth in CoC activities, HUD can develop recommendations for all CoCs that outline strategies for recruitment and training of members and ways to engage with them, as well as provide or identify sources of sustained financial support to pay YAB members for their involvement. Finally, to foster cross-sector coordination, HUD can engage with other sectors at the national level in discussions around eligibility and definitions of homelessness. HUD could also consider more explicit incentives for CoCs to engage in such efforts at state or local levels, such as training child welfare and juvenile justice staff to do coordinated entry assessments and referrals or cofunding navigators to help youth aging out of these systems to access the services and supports they need.

HUD could help communities better understand the size and characteristics of the population of youth experiencing homelessness through technical assistance on data collection and analysis for both the PIT and Homeless Management Information System data. Finally, HUD can support the continued tracking of changes across CoCs nationally in the implementation of youth-specific services and housing, as well as the challenges they face, and provide ongoing guidance about the types of assistance CoCs need to continue to address youth homelessness in their communities.

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Office of Policy Development and Research  
Washington, DC 20410-6000



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